



**Forging New Standards of Excellence II:
A Re-Examination of the Arkansas State Plan
for the Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor**

1998

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In response to LSC's August 1995 Program Letter, Arkansas's legal services programs came together and initiated an ongoing statewide planning process that resulted in a planning document entitled ***Arkansas State Plan for the Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor: Forging New Standards of Excellence***. Since that time, the six legal programs have continued to fine-tune this plan in a cooperative effort to further improve and expand legal services to eligible clients in Arkansas. Arkansas' legal services programs welcome this opportunity to report on this ongoing planning process.

1. How are intake and delivery of advice and referral services structured within the state? What steps can be taken to ensure a delivery network that maximizes client access, efficient delivery, and high quality legal assistance?

Legal services programs in Arkansas use a combination of walk-in, appointment, and hotline intake systems. Generally, walk-ins are accepted on certain days of the week during a set time-frame. Intake is conducted by telephone on other days of the weeks. Intake schedules are rotated among the legal staff. At the Center for Arkansas Legal Services, all intake is conducted via the hotline. Programs with large geographic service areas conduct intake at several outreach sites on a regular basis. All programs have established 1-800 numbers that allow applicants to make free phone calls to initiate the intake process.

All legal services programs either employ a multilingual staff member or have interpreters available for serving clients who speak other languages. Other provider agencies – mental health agencies, veterans' groups, welfare reform groups, disability advocacy groups, credit counseling agencies, domestic abuse shelters – routinely make referrals to legal services programs in their respective service areas. Several programs have cooperative agreements with providers such as Area Agencies on Aging, Community Economic Development Agencies, and VOCA-funded agencies.

Each legal services program conducts evaluation of intake, advice and referral system effectiveness on a regular basis. Managing Attorneys and Executive Directors regularly review these systems on a daily or weekly basis in an effort to identify problems affecting the overall quality of client services.

In an effort to better serve Arkansas' elderly population, the six legal services programs initiated a joint pro bono venture with the Arkansas Bar Association and the State Office on Aging in 1983. This unique collaboration resulted in the creation of Arkansas Volunteer Lawyers for the Elderly (AVLE), a program that for the last two years has closed approximately 500 pro bono cases per year.

Strengths/Weaknesses of Current Intake Systems

A walk-in system has the advantages of being convenient for applicants, communicating the desire to serve the client community, and assuring diversity of intake. A disadvantage of the walk-in system is that it creates an uneven workload.

An appointment intake system eliminates the problem of an uneven workload. Staff members conducting intake can plan their work schedule thus limiting both overload and slack time. A disadvantage of this system is that clients may have to wait for help due to under-staffing following federal funding cuts.

Transition to Hotline Intake

Several of the programs have implemented hotlines. Legal Services of Northeast Arkansas and Ozark Legal Services both have hotlines that use full-time staff attorneys and paralegals to provide brief service and referrals. The Center for Arkansas Legal Services started a hotline that employs four part-time attorneys, one full-time managing attorney and three full-time screeners. A major reason for implementing these hotlines was to provide information and referrals to clients in a more efficient, service-oriented way.

Strengths/Weaknesses of a Hotline Intake System

A hotline intake system is a more efficient way of delivering services to clients. Clients can obtain help without the time and expense of traveling to an office. This is particularly beneficial in the areas of the state (almost all) that do not have adequate public transportation. Significantly less time is required to provide advice and referrals by telephone than by face-to-face meetings with clients. Without a hotline, clients may have to wait several weeks to meet with an attorney. A delay in receiving help is frustrating and, in some cases, detrimental to the client's situation.

A hotline enables staff to help more clients. A large percentage of problems can be identified and resolved with one telephone call. Thus, staff attorneys can shift their focus from simple cases to more complicated ones. This is particularly beneficial for offices that have lost staff due to federal funding cutbacks in recent years.

Clients appreciate having the opportunity to relate their problems to a good listener even if a problem cannot be fully resolved by a legal services program. Because hotline attorneys specialize in advice and brief service, they become very skilled at lending a sympathetic ear while giving advice that is detailed, accurate and understandable.

Nevertheless, a hotline system does have limitations. Programs must continue to schedule traditional face-to-face interviews for applicants who do not have access to a telephone or who can't fully understand advice given by telephone. Also, it is imperative that a hotline office establishes a system for handling life-threatening situations.

In the initial stages of implementing the hotline it is necessary to move slowly, working out the bugs of adding coverage for additional counties. Staff must be committed to the process and willing to make adjustments as necessary to accommodate the demands of system.

The Goal: Statewide Hotline Planning Begins

In December 1997, as part of the ongoing statewide planning process, John Arango came to Arkansas and led a meeting focused on establishing goals to expand and improve the civil legal services delivery in Arkansas. The planning group included program directors from each of the six legal programs; IOLTA staff and board members; Arkansas Bar Association staff and Arkansas Judicial Council staff and members.

The planning group came to the consensus that all legal services programs should work together to create a statewide hotline so that clients needing advice, brief service or referral could be served more efficiently. The group agreed that funding for the hotline would have to come from the state legislature.

Following the December planning meeting, members of the Arkansas Bar Association's Task Force on Legal Services, led by a senior partner in the state's second largest law firm, have been hard at work educating legislators, judges and other stake-holders about the advantages of a statewide hotline.

The legal services programs have met continuously during this year to work out the logistics of implementing the hotline. In addition, the programs have asked the Arkansas Bar Association to include a funding request for the hotline in the its 1999 legislative package. The programs also developed a joint proposal requesting IOLTA funding to hire a consultant to assist with development of the statewide hotline.

June 1998 was a landmark month in the process of developing the hotline:

- IOLTA approved funding for the consultant
- Arkansas Bar Association agreed to include a funding request for the hotline in its legislative package
- The legal services programs took advantage of the opportunity to inform members of Arkansas judiciary about program priorities, funding and the statewide hotline concept during an hour-long presentation at the 1998 Judicial Council Meeting

Major Steps and Timetable for Implementation of the Statewide Hotline

Step	Completion Date
Hire Hotline Consultant	July 1998
Develop Budget for Start-Up Costs	August 1998
Finalize Hotline Setup Including Computer/Telephone Equipment and Staffing Needs	October 1998
Educate Stake-holders	Ongoing
Obtain State Funding	March 1999
Purchase Equipment and Hire Staff	August 1999
Begin Operation of Hotline	December 1999
Evaluate and Make Adjustments to System	Ongoing

2. **Is there a state legal services technology plan? How can technological capacities be developed statewide to assure compatibility, promote efficiency, improve quality, and expand services to clients?**

Program-wide, each casehandler has his or her own desktop computer. As new equipment and systems are put into place, training is immediately conducted so that staff members feel comfortable with and are able to utilize the equipment effectively. Ongoing training is also planned so that staff can take advantage of hardware and software updates as they become available.

All programs are moving toward system standardization including upgrading computers, installation of Windows-based data processing, spreadsheet and database software and Local Area Networks (LANs). With the set up of LANs, all casehandlers will have access to standard forms and pleadings as well as the legal research database, Law Office Information Systems Professional Library (LOIS).

Eventually, all six programs will have Kemp's case management software in place to handle timekeeping, conflicts and case referral tasks. All programs have e-mail capabilities among staff and at least one in-house computer configured for Internet e-mail access. Two programs have Internet e-mail service available on each staff member's computer. Three programs have web pages that feature case priorities, eligibility guidelines, service areas, contact information, community legal education brochures, volunteer requests, and research links.

In June 1998, the Resource Coordination and Training Unit for Arkansas Legal Services Programs established a web page that features the statewide newsletter, *Legal Services Reporter*. In the future, the web page will include pro bono training

announcements, a brief bank and other helpful documents and articles.

Strengths/Weaknesses and Goals of the Technology Plan

Given the limited resources available, legal services programs in Arkansas are proud of the status of technology capacities at the present time. Strengths include standardization of Windows-based technology, legal research databases, Kemp's case management software and the availability of internet-based research and e-mail capabilities in each office. Weaknesses are lack of a Wide Area Network that would link each legal services office in the state; statewide e-mail capabilities that allow each staff member to conduct e-mail communication from his/her desk; and inability, at present, to refer PAI cases electronically. Each of these weaknesses might need to be addressed individually or could be resolved in tandem through use of an extranet (an interactive web-based system that is accessible via the Internet but which is secured for use to a list of designated individuals.)

However, as work on the statewide hotline begins (see response to question #1) and funding becomes available, these weaknesses will ultimately be addressed.

Major Steps and Timetable for Technology Updates

Step	Completion Date
Local Area Network in Each Office	January 1999
Kemp's Case Management Software in Each Office	January 1999
Brief and Pleading Bank Available through RC&T Web Page	January 2000
Web Page Established for Each Office	July 1999
Wide Area Network or Extranet Linking All Programs	January 2001
Statewide E-Mail Available on Each Staff Members Computer	January 2001
Establish method for referring PAI cases electronically	January 2001

- 3. What are the major barriers low-income persons face in gaining access to justice in the state? What efforts can be taken on a statewide basis to expand client access to the courts, provide preventive legal education and advice, and enhance self-help opportunities for low-income persons?**

Federal funding cuts and restrictions on advocacy continue to present major barriers to justice for low-income persons in Arkansas. In the wake of 1996 funding cutbacks, branch offices throughout the state were closed and at least 33 staff members were lost. Since that time, no new non-LSC funded programs have been

established in this state. Thus, if a legal services program in Arkansas is unable to take an applicant's case, then that applicant has nowhere else to turn.

In an effort to develop new avenues of advocacy, all six legal services programs engage in ongoing preventive legal education efforts. Some examples are: presentations by staff attorneys and pro bono attorneys at senior centers on grandparents' visitation rights, telemarketing fraud and "end of life" issues such as powers of attorney, living wills and trusts; consumer/debt collection clinics; and appearances at community punishment re-entry programs to discuss public benefits and custody issues. All programs have developed newsletters and/or brochures that feature preventive legal education topics and are available to the public. Several programs have also developed brochures for special population clients (the elderly and victims of domestic violence). Many brochures are also available in foreign languages.

The Resource Coordination and Training Unit has been considering developing a series of 30-minute preventive legal education programs which would air on local cable community access channels throughout the state. Program topics being considered are domestic violence; welfare reform; childrens' SSI; elder law issues; contractor fraud; and problems with used cars.

In Arkansas, welfare reform is taking place at the county level through a network of local Temporary Economic Assistance (TEA) coalitions. A number of these TEA coalitions are working to set up Welfare-to-Work Service Centers which would house a number of booths hosted by service agencies. A legal services booth can be established inside each of these Centers. A telephone with direct dial into the local legal services hotline can be installed in each booth. The booth would also display informational and preventive legal education pamphlets. Periodic self-help seminars can be conducted at each booth.

Ozark Legal Services has recently initiated a project with the Chancellors in the Fourteenth Judicial District to provide pro se materials on uncontested divorces and child support modifications to eligible applicants who do not meet case acceptance priorities.

Legal services programs can also begin to work with local bar association committees, the Arkansas Bar Association Legal Aid Committee and local courts to set up self-help centers modeled on successful centers in other states.

Access to Justice at Present in Arkansas: Strengths, Weaknesses, Goals

Preventive legal education is a strength of all legal services programs in Arkansas. Each program is aggressively working to educate its client base. RC&T will begin an emphasis on sharing of educational models and materials on a statewide basis through its web page.

Pro se systems (with the exception of orders of protection for victims of domestic abuse) are virtually nonexistent in Arkansas. Arkansas courts have for the most part

been reluctant to establish pro se delivery systems. However, legal services programs can begin working with local bar associations to advocate the use of pro se systems in appropriate circumstances.

Major Steps and Timetable for Increasing Access to Justice

Step	Completion Date
Continue and Increase Preventive Legal Education Efforts	Ongoing
Establish Databank of Preventive Legal Education Models and Materials	July 1999
Develop and Produce Program for Community Access Channel	January 2000
Establish Booths in Welfare-To-Work Centers	July 1999
Work with Bar Association and Judiciary to Launch Self-Help Centers	July 2000

4. Do program staff and pro bono attorneys throughout the state receive the training and have access to information and expert assistance necessary for the delivery of high quality legal services? How can statewide capacities be developed and strengthened to meet these needs?

A shared vision and commitment to collaboration led to the creation of the Resource Coordination and Training Unit (RC&T) in 1996. This state support unit provides training, technical support and professional development for legal services staff and volunteers. All six legal services programs jointly govern RC&T in an advisory capacity. RC&T is staffed by one full-time director who is a licensed attorney.

Training

Training is a key component to retain excellent staff and encourage pro bono participation. RC&T produces training programs for staff and a growing cadre of pro bono lawyers across Arkansas. Many of these programs are offered to pro bono attorneys at a significant savings compared to other continuing legal education offerings in Arkansas. The annual statewide conference is designed for staff only.

A needs assessment is conducted on an annual basis. The assessment includes evaluation of training needs in substantive law, legal skills, management and technology skills. Results from this assessment are reported to members of the RC&T advisory board, who then assess priorities and develop a training plan for the upcoming year. In addition, at the conclusion of each training program, attendees are asked to complete an evaluation form. Information from these forms is collected and tabulated to

be used as part of an ongoing assessment of training programs.

Recent training programs include:

- 1) **Legal Services 1997 Statewide Conference**; October 1997; Fairfield Bay; attended by 95 staff members
- 2) **SSI Update** (co-sponsored with the Arkansas Bar Association); November 1997; Four locations: Fort Smith, Forrest City, Little Rock, Hope; attended by 105 staff members and pro bono attorneys
- 3) **Social Security Workshop**; February 1998; attended by 20 staff members
- 4) **Welfare Reform Satellite Seminar** (co-sponsored with UALR School of Social Work); February 1998; attended by 10 staff members
- 5) **Nothing but 'Net: A Guide to the Internet for Legal Services Staff** (a hands-on Internet training); registration limited to 25 staff members; April 1998; each attendee received written hand out plus a diskette with 25+ legal-related bookmarks
- 6) **Recent Developments in Bankruptcy Law**; April 1998; Four locations: Camden, Fort Smith, Little Rock, and Jonesboro; attended by 135 staff members and pro bono attorneys

Planning is underway for:

- 1) **1998 Statewide Conference**; October 1998; Fairfield Bay
- 2) **Evidence Seminars (legal skills trainings)**; November 1998; Two locations: Fayetteville and Little Rock
- 3) **AARP Foundation Substantive Law and Advocacy Skills Trainings on Nursing Home Law, ADA issues and Medicaid**; April - May 1999; Batesville, West Memphis, Monticello and Fayetteville

Task Force Coordination

Legal services programs participate in task force groups that focus on four substantive law areas: Family/Juvenile Law, Welfare Reform, Housing and Consumer Law. Each task force is chaired by a staff attorney. Administrative assistance is provided by the RC&T. The task force groups meet at least twice a year, concentrating on training, case review, legal strategies and recent developments in the law.

RC&T will be asking each task force to develop a series of questions for use with the special problems codes in Kemp's case management database during the next year. For example, if a client calls with a landlord/tenant problem, an appropriate series of questions that should be asked of that client during the initial intake can be developed for use through Kemp's. Thus, intake workers can draw on the collective "brain power" of the housing task force as they use these questions. RC&T will also ask each task force to develop a series of answers to clients' most frequently asked questions. These answers will be added to the case management system as well so that inexperienced advocates can easily and quickly address basic client questions.

Publications

The Poverty Law Practice Manual is designed to serve as a practical, basic desk reference on selected matters routinely handled by legal services and pro bono attorneys in Arkansas. The manual is edited by the RC&T Director and updated every other year. The 1998 edition of the manual is 400 pages long and covers ten substantive areas of the law: family law; social security disability benefits; civil procedure; rights of individuals with disabilities; juvenile law; consumer law; landlord and tenant; unemployment compensation; public benefits; and migrant workers. Each legal services program distributes free copies of the Poverty Law Practice Manual to members of its pro bono panel.

RC&T also publishes a quarterly newsletter called *The Legal Services Reporter*. The newsletter focuses on articles about staff, case notes, volunteer recognition, recent developments in the law, technology updates, etc. This is the primary vehicle for the dissemination of information about significant judicial and administrative developments. It is distributed to more than 200 staff members, board members, funding agencies, volunteers, nonprofit organizations, and state and federal legislators.

RC&T subscribes to the Arkansas Legislative Digest during the years that the Arkansas Legislature is in session. Legislative developments are monitored and reported in *The Legal Services Reporter*. At the conclusion of the session, a poverty law update training seminar is scheduled. Panelists for this seminar include members of the state senate and house.

Technology Developments in Information Dissemination

RC&T recently developed a web page to further its efforts in the areas of training and information dissemination. An electronic version of *The Legal Services Reporter* is posted on the page and plans for the future include posting pro bono training announcements, a brief bank, helpful articles and, perhaps, conducting needs assessment via the web page rather than on paper.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Statewide Training and Information Dissemination

Legal services programs in Arkansas were on the cutting edge of strategically

coordinating their training efforts when, in 1996, the programs decided to jointly fund RC&T. Since that time, consistent assessment of and planning for training needs of staff and pro bono attorneys has taken place. Statewide meetings of all legal services staff takes place on an annual basis.

However, RC&T operates on a shoe-string. Prior to 1996, state support in Arkansas was staffed by five employees. Now, all of the work is done by one staff member. Lack of regional training resources due to funding cutbacks impacts the training component as well. Thus, while it is the consensus of all of the legal services programs that training efforts are adequate at the present time, lack of funding severely limits RC&T's ability to expand and strengthen training – particularly in the area of legal skills training.

Major Steps and Timetable for Increasing Capacities for Training and Information

Step	Completion Date
Continue Annual Needs Assessment	Annual
Continue Planning Training Programs for Staff and Pro Bono Attorneys	Ongoing
Continue Task Force Coordination	Ongoing
Conduct Annual Needs Assessment via RC&T Web Page	July 2000
Continue Biennial Updates of Poverty Law Practice Manual	Ongoing
Continue Publication of Newsletter	Ongoing
Expand Efforts to Locate Alternative Training Funding/Grants	Ongoing
Assessment of Training Resources Within State	Ongoing

5. **What is the current status of private attorney involvement in the state? What statewide efforts can be undertaken to increase the involvement of private attorneys in the delivery of legal services?**

Arkansas legal services programs rely heavily on the volunteer support of private lawyers to help provide legal assistance to low income Arkansans. Almost 2500 attorneys – a little more than one third of the state's resident attorneys – participate in pro bono programs statewide, primarily accepting referrals or contributing funds. In 1992, Arkansas ranked eighth in the United States in the percentage of attorneys participating in organized pro bono work for the poor.

Each program has developed strong volunteer lawyer projects to help meet the increasing demand for services. Additionally, the six legal services programs initiated a

joint pro bono venture, Arkansas Volunteer Lawyers for the Elderly (AVLE), with the Arkansas Bar Association and the State Office on Aging in 1983. AVLE focuses on serving our elderly population and, for the last two years, has closed approximately 500 pro bono cases per year.

Two of the pro bono programs in Arkansas have received the prestigious Harrison-Tweed Award from the American Bar Association, which is given each year to the outstanding pro bono program in the United States. Another pro bono program received the 1995 Eldercare Volunteer Corps Award for outstanding volunteer legal services to seniors.

As mentioned earlier in this plan (see response to question #4), RC&T produces training programs for both staff and our pro bono lawyers. The pro bono attorneys can attend these programs at a significant savings compared to other continuing legal education offerings in Arkansas. RC&T makes a concerted effort to offer at least 12 CLE hours each year, so that pro bono attorneys can satisfy their mandatory CLE requirements by attending RC&T training programs exclusively.

Each legal services program distributes free copies of the Poverty Law Practice Manual, a 400-page practical desk reference that covers ten substantive areas of poverty law, to members of its pro bono panel. Other benefits of serving as a pro bono attorney include regular newsletters that feature practice tips, relevant articles and training opportunity information.

All programs work hard to recognize all pro bono attorneys for their willingness to donate their time and talents to provide legal assistance to low income people in the state. Special recognition is given to those volunteers who are identified as going above and beyond of the call of duty in accepting referrals and representing clients. These volunteers are usually feted at a local bar luncheon, given an award and featured in the pro bono program's newsletter. Publicity for pro bono efforts throughout the state is also sought from the Arkansas Bar Association. The Association has been a great partner in getting the word out about the excellence of pro bono involvement in Arkansas.

Pro bono attorneys are called upon by the Resource Coordination and Training Unit to serve as trainers or panelists in continuing legal education seminars that are offered to staff and other pro bono attorneys. Many of the legal services programs also depend on pro bono attorneys to assist with community legal education events.

Following implementation of the statewide hotline in 1999, it is conceivable that growing demand for hotline services will necessitate growth of pro bono involvement on a statewide basis. This will enable the programs to recruit those attorneys who may have previously been reluctant to participate in a pro bono program for fear that they could not commit the time necessary to handle the cases. Hotline work should have a special appeal for these attorneys – they can commit to a set number of hours per week without concern that a pro bono caseload may require more time than they can afford to give.

Discussions are underway regarding the development of non-traditional pro bono opportunities that have been presented in recent years. The programs are considering establishing a mentor program that would focus on enlisting senior (over 60) attorneys to serve as mentors to less experienced pro bono attorneys. As referrals are made to the inexperienced attorneys, they would be given the option of making contact with a mentor, who would be available to answer their questions and help them develop the case. The programs are also considering working with the Arkansas Bar Association to create a statewide inspirational goal for pro bono service.

Strengths, Weaknesses and Goals for Private Attorney Involvement

Legal services programs in Arkansas have a long tradition of developing and maintaining strong volunteer lawyer projects. Innovations in developing new pro bono programs to ensure meaningful access to clients with distinct needs – particularly the elderly – are part of that tradition.

As new technology has become available to the legal services programs in Arkansas, we have kept our pro bono panels informed about our web pages and e-mail capabilities. Pro bono attorneys who are e-mail enthusiasts can seek assistance and support electronically, if they choose to do so.

It *has* been difficult to secure pro bono representation in some of the rural areas of the state. Several counties in Arkansas have no resident attorneys. Renewed efforts to overcome this problem are being undertaken. Fortunately, lawyers from surrounding counties have demonstrated a willingness to provide services to low income clients in those counties that do not have a pro bono base. One goal for the future is to develop new and unique methods of providing pro bono help in those counties that do not have a large attorney base.

Major Steps and Timetable for Increasing Private Attorney Involvement

Step	Completion Date
Continue Recruitment of Pro Bono Attorneys	Ongoing
Continue Pro Bono Recognition Events and Awards	Ongoing
Continue Using Pro Bono Attorneys in Training Programs	Ongoing
Recruit Pro Bono Attorneys for the Statewide Hotline	July 2000
Establish Inspirational Goal for Pro Bono Service in State	July 2000
Establish Senior Attorney Mentor Panel	January 2000
Develop New Model for Serving Rural Counties that Lack Resident Attorney Base	January 2000

6. What statewide financial resources are available for legal services to low-income persons within the state? How can these resources be preserved and expanded?

Legal Services Corporation provides ninety-eight percent of the funding for Arkansas legal services programs. Because Arkansas is such a poor state, funding from sources other than LSC is almost non-existent. In 1997, the Arkansas IOLTA Foundation awarded \$ 400,500 to legal services programs in Arkansas. Other sources of funds are Victims of Crime Act (VOCA); the United Way; Older Americans Act; Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA); Domestic Violence Victims Civil Legal Assistance grants; HUD Housing Counseling grants; and the Arkansas Development Finance Authority (ADFA). One program raised \$120,000 in donations from members of the bar that elected to “opt-out” of pro bono service.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Statewide Funding Resources

As previously mentioned, Arkansas is a poor state. There are a limited number of public funding sources in the state, period. All legal services have been vigilant in identifying and developing these alternative resources as evidenced by the list of other public funding sources outlined above.

A problem with many of these funding sources is that money is available only for “special projects” and not as a contribution to general revenues. Also, the funding process is capricious – many funders have the mind-set that they must “spread the money around.” Thus, if a source awards a grant to legal services program one year, that source may decide to “skip” a grant award the next year in favor of another grantee.

There is also a feeling among several funding sources that limited resources should support only those organizations that do not receive any federal funds. This, of course, takes legal services programs out of the running.

Many funding sources, such as the United Way, are interested in making awards on the local level. As a result, a grant request by a local legal services program is more likely to be awarded than a grant request on behalf of all legal services programs in the state.

Goals to Preserve and Expand Financial Resources

Recognizing early on that fund-raising in Arkansas would be difficult, the legal services programs began exploring funding alternatives in February of 1996. Initial efforts began with a Round Table Discussion among bar leaders, legal services providers, Arkansas Bar Association staff and the IOLTA Executive Director.

A key outcome of that initial meeting was the formation of a Legal Services Task Force within the Bar Association. That task force was charged with finding new ways to

expand funding for the provision of legal services. After several meetings, the task force urged the Bar Association's leadership to support a proposed state legislative appropriation for legal services to the poor. Ultimately, the Association's House of Delegates unanimously approved the proposal and included state funding for legal services in the Bar Association's 1997 legislative package. Unfortunately, the state funding proposal was ultimately defeated.

In December of 1997, as part of the ongoing statewide planning process, John Arango again came to Arkansas and led a statewide planning meeting (see response to question #1). That meeting led to another attempt to obtain funding from the Arkansas legislature, this time to fund a statewide hotline.

Since then, members of the Legal Services Task Force (led by a senior partner in the state's second largest law firm) have been hard at work educating legislators, judges and other stake-holders about the advantages of a statewide hotline. In June 1998, the Arkansas Bar Association once again agreed to include a funding request for the hotline in its legislative package. The Association lobbyist and a committee of bar leaders is working hard to continue discussions with legislators about the hotline prior to the next legislative session which will begin in January of 1999.

Major Steps and Timetable for Preserving and Expanding Financial Resources

Step	Completion Date
Continue Identifying and Developing New Resources	Ongoing
Maintain Good Relationships with Current Funders	Ongoing
Secure State Legislative Appropriation	March 1999

7. Where there are a number of LSC-funded programs and/or the presence of very small programs, how should the legal services programs be configured within the state to maximize the effective and economical delivery of high quality legal services to eligible clients within a comprehensive, integrated delivery system?

The six legal services programs in Arkansas share a proud history of providing high quality legal assistance in civil matters to low income Arkansans. This has been effectively accomplished even though the programs are required to cover large geographic areas and serve large poverty populations compared to similar legal services programs in the other parts of the United States.

The programs have established strong local identities and a solid reputations within their respective service areas. In so doing, they have developed positive, healthy relationships with local citizenry, bench and bar, the aging community, academic institutions and government leaders. Yet, as demonstrated throughout this report, the programs have continuously sought to cooperate on a number of joint ventures and

projects in a effort to most effectively utilize limited resources and funding.

Given the demands of Arkansas' poverty population and geography, the current configuration – in conjunction with the wide-ranging collaborative efforts outlined in this report – represents an effective, comprehensive and integrated delivery system that best meets the needs in this state.

Merger of Legal Services of Arkansas and Central Arkansas Legal Services

One of the programs, the Center for Arkansas Legal Services, is the product of a merger between the former Legal Services of Arkansas (LSA) and the former Central Arkansas Legal Services (CALS) programs. Each program's board of directors agreed to the merger as the most effective way of coping with the federal cutbacks and the potential loss of services to the client community in central and south Arkansas. The merger made sense because both programs were serving similar client populations in adjacent geographical areas. The programs also had complementary priorities.

Ultimately, the merger of these two programs has been a success but not an unqualified one. During the merger, several branch offices were closed and there was a great deal of anxiety among staff. The new program is still faced with the tremendous challenge of serving a large client population in an extensive geographic area with fewer branch offices, less staff and insufficient funding.

Learning from the Past – Looking toward the Future

Having had the opportunity to learn from the merger of LSA and CALS, the six legal services programs in Arkansas agree that the current configuration coupled with a strong statewide support component and a statewide hotline allows for the most effective and economical delivery of high quality legal services to eligible clients in this state. There are a number of benefits to be maintained:

1. **The current delivery system enables each legal services program to develop priorities and office systems so that the program can most effectively meet the unique needs of the client community in its service area.** For example, the demand for services relating to housing problems in the Delta has created a unique opportunity for East Arkansas Legal Services (EALS). By providing housing counseling to low income residents, EALS has been able to increase access to affordable housing for many of its clients through home buyer assistance classes, credit counseling and home maintenance workshops. EALS also provides legal assistance to community and non-profit groups in the area of Community Economic Development. Similarly, other programs have developed projects designed to meet the special needs in their service areas, such as clinics for abused children or the elderly. These are just a few

examples of how each program has developed a service model that is highly responsive to the needs of its client community.

2. **Advocates within each program have developed a high level of expertise in handling matters before local courts and in making referrals to local agencies.** The current delivery system allows each program to take full advantage of this expertise to provide the highest quality assistance to clients within each program's service area.
3. **Involvement of local private attorneys in board work and on pro bono panels is greatly enhanced by contact with local programs.** Although there is a lot of "state pride" here in Arkansas, attorneys have an affinity for their local communities. They point with pride to the work they do on behalf of local services programs in their communities. Maintaining contact with these attorneys on a local basis is crucial to the continued development of volunteer board members and pro bono panelists. This can best be accomplished through the current configuration.
4. **Local funding sources are more likely to contribute to a local legal services program.** Many funding sources are interested in making awards on the local level. As a result, a grant request by a local legal services program is more likely to be awarded than a grant request on behalf of all legal services programs in the state. The current configuration facilitates local fund-raising efforts while allowing the programs to work together with statewide organizations such as the Arkansas Bar Association to develop revenues through a state appropriation. Thus, the programs can avail themselves of wider range of funding options within the framework of the current delivery system.

Proper planning and collaboration by Arkansas' legal services programs, the private bar and others has led to an effective, comprehensive and integrated delivery system that best meets the needs of the poor in this state. The addition of a statewide hotline will only complement the delivery system that we now have in place. With the continuing efforts of all involved, Arkansas can forge new standards of excellence in the provision of legal services to the poor in the years ahead.